

Papa's Nurse

Scrawler-1
2nd Place

"Amelia, please hand me the damp cloth," Mama called from the bedroom.

"Yes, Mama," I replied. I fetched the small white cloth from its bowl full of water. I handed it to Mama, and watched her nurse Papa. Before I was born, Mama was a nurse. She taught me how to care for ill people and make medicines.

I pulled the stool up close to the bed, and reached over to hold Papa's hand. I had gotten used to not feeling his strong grip on my palm. This year, the small pox disease had already almost killed Papa. I looked down at him. His usually green eyes that always sparkled were closed. Mama liked to say that my eyes were just like Papa's. My father's brown hair looked gray and unkempt. Papa's usually leathery, tanned skin was now pale and delicate. This was not the Papa I knew.

"Amelia, supper is on the table for you," Mama said as she propped Papa up on his pillows to drink the tea she brought for my father. I gave his hand a gentle squeeze and kissed him on his thin and hollow cheek before I left the room to eat.

After I set myself at the round, small, wooden table, I looked down at my meal. The stew with Indian meal barely filled half of Mama's smallest bowls. Our tiny farm was not doing so well. The Wisconsin summer was exceedingly warm. Getting food from the town is too expensive, and the neighbors were not willing to give us any food. It was too far, and we couldn't leave Papa alone for a long time.

The next morning was the same as always. I had breakfast, Mama fed Papa, and I watered the crops. I also washed some clothes and hung them on the clothing line outside to dry. Everything was perfectly normal. Well, almost.

Lately, I had noticed Mama was acting differently. She was spending time in her own world a lot. Much more food filled the jars in the kitchen. Usually Mama only dried fruit in the winter, when there was barley anything to eat. Nowadays, she was stringing fruit slices on the food drying line outside. I knew something was amiss when Mama's travel bag was open on her bed. I had to know what was going on.

"Mama, is anything happening?" I tried hard to act casual, even though I was very nervous.

Mama sighed, and put her hands on my shoulders. "There is a medicine that will help Papa get better. We cannot make it. Unfortunately, it is very expensive, and we do not have the money for it." Mama took a deep breath and continued on. "I have decided to take a short trip to town to find a job so I can earn the money to buy the medicine. I will only be gone for a few days. I require you to stay home to take care of your father."

"Yes, Mama. I will do my best," I said, trying to sound brave. Really, I felt small and weak on the inside.

My mother's eyes filled with pride as she pulled me in for a tight hug. "That's my girl," she said.

The house felt so empty without Mama. I counted the long, hard days that Mama was gone. She was away much longer than just a few days; she was gone for a few weeks! Papa didn't get any better, but luckily, he didn't get any worse. There was only one time that I was worried.

It was the first time that Papa slept the night through since he got sick without needing something from me. His breathing was steady, and quiet. He did not make a sound all night. I did not know if this was good or bad. I was distraught.

In the morning I rushed into Papa's room to see how he was doing. His eyes were still closed, but, to my great relief, he was breathing.

I was preparing lunch when I heard a quiet knock on the door. I rushed to answer it. I was so very happy when I saw it was Mama. Her blond hair was ruffled and her pale blue eyes had circles under them. I ran into her arms.

"Amelia! I was not able to get the medicine; all the jobs were already taken. I am so sorry I was gone for long. I was looking for a job for a long time. How is. . ." Mama's sentence trailed as she looked over my head. Astonishment and disbelief filled her eyes.

"Mama, what is it? What is going on?" I demanded. And then I looked over my shoulder.

Papa was standing in the doorway to his room, gripping the door handle! Mama dropped her travel bag, and we ran into Papa's arms.

Papa's green eyes were sparkling. Color had returned to his cheeks. He held Mama and me with all the strength he had. Papa was finally well, and I had helped make it happen!

Right then, I knew I wanted to become a nurse. I wanted people to have the same experience I had when Papa was finally well. Love, happiness and gratefulness included. My new dream was to become a nurse.

Epilogue

After Papa regained his strength, he went back to working at the town mill. Once he earned enough money and I became of age, I was able to go to medical school. There, I learned how to be a nurse, which had been my dream for a long time. After about twenty years, I retired and began teaching young women whose dream was to also become a nurse to cure others. I lived happily for the rest of my life.